



On your marks

Joshua has now reached old age. He has led God's people into the Promised Land and settled the 12 tribes into their new homes. When he took over from Moses, he was told to be very courageous, never to forget the story of God's people, and to meditate on God's laws day and night (Joshua 1). Now, in this final speech, he reminds them of the whole Bible story so far. What has happened was part of a big plan! But what has happened for us is also part of God's big plan to save the world through our Joshua, who is Jesus.

Get set

At the end of Joshua 24, Joshua sent everyone back to their homes (Joshua 24:28). Here is the key for the end of this series on Joshua:

- What will we be taking back to our homes?

There is a useful retelling of this story in The Barnabas Children's Bible (story 84).

Go!

1. Here is an active warm-up for this session that uses the whole story of the book of Joshua as its framework:

The Book of Joshua in actions

- God's words to Joshua: *Be strong; be brave; I'm with you wherever you go* - Put one finger up on each hand in turn, one for each word of this command and promise
- Study the Book of the Law - Open palms like a book
- Spies were sent - Furtive looking around and then hiding
- The river was crossed - Walking through mud
- The stone monument was erected - Piling up stones
- There was a rededication and a remembrance - Praying and eating
- Joshua meets the Commander of the Armies of the Lord - On guard with a sword
- There was marching and trumpets - On the spot slow marching and mournful trumpet sound
- Then a shout and the collapse - Hand cupped around mouths and then hands high, then roll down
- Then a defeat - Mime shock and then the digging for Achan's stolen goods
- The scroll was read - Open up an imaginary scroll and write words on a rock
- There was trickery from the Gibeonites - Look sneaky
- The defeat of five kings; hailstones; sunlight extra - Pull down five fingers; shelter from hailstones; look with amazement at your watch
- More fighting and the defeat of 31 kings - Mock fighting and then count 31 on your fingers
- The dividing of the Land: South - Judah, Simeon, Benjamin and Dan; Centre - Ephraim; East -

Mannasseh (half east and half west), Reuben and Gad; North - Issachar, Zebulun, Naphtali and Asher; Everywhere - Levi - Point and count off the tribes in different directions

- The stories of Caleb - Walking stick and looking brave - and Ascar - Feisty daughter, hands on hips
- Creation of safe cities - Running
- Back to the scroll/book - Count out this message on your fingers: all God's promises prove true
- Joshua says goodbye - Wave
- Joshua gives a challenge - Open hands either side - your choice

2. See the story version given below.

3. Joshua challenged the people to get rid of any false gods and to make a choice (Joshua 24:14 - 15). He was clear about his choice and he challenged them to make their choice clear too, out loud and three times!

- 'As for me and my family we will serve the Lord.'

This is an opportunity to make our own commitment as a response to the stories of Joshua. One idea would be to make bookmarks with this verse suitably illustrated, maybe with scenes from the story of Joshua. Alternatively, you could talk about the ways to make or do something that will be a daily reminder at home in the week ahead that we have decided to serve the Lord.

4. Joshua took a stone and set it up as a place of witness (Joshua 24:25 - 27). Just as there was a pile of stones that reminded the people of the miracle of the crossing of the Jordan (Joshua 4:21 - 24), now there would be another stone, under an oak tree, with a record of this day.

Hand out some small stones and invite your group to decorate them with something special - in words or pictures - from the story of Joshua that they never want to forget. Talk about possible ideas first but what they put on them will be their own personal response. Suggest that they find somewhere safe to keep them at home as a reminder of what they have said to God.

Story version of Joshua 24: The speech

What a hero! What a story! 'Be strong and very courageous' - that's what God had said to Joshua, and he had been. 'I will be with you wherever you go' - that's what God had promised, and he had been.

Rivers crossed, walls shattered, daylight hours extended, hailstones crashed, kings defeated - 31 to be precise - nations conquered and the 12 tribes settled in God's Promised Land. What a life's work it had been for Joshua! Now it was time for him to go home to God; to enter the true Promised Land of heaven and to rest from his work. But Joshua had one last task to perform.

The summons went out to all the leaders of the tribes of Israel. They were to gather before Joshua at Shechem, where their champion had one last speech to deliver - not words to prepare them for war but words to help them keep the peace. People's last words are important and so were Joshua's on that day.



‘God chose us, we didn’t choose him. He chose us, not because we were greater in number than anyone else; not because we were better than any other nation; God chose us because he loves us. He is a God who comes so close; a God who hears us when we cry to him.’

The leaders murmured their approval. They had heard these words before, spoken by Moses just before he had died. Joshua had truly been a worthy successor to ‘the friend of God’.

‘God spoke to our ancestor Abraham and called him to leave his home and family to worship the one true God. Abraham obeyed and set out for the land of Canaan... for this very land on which we stand this day: God’s Promised Land. And God blessed Abraham and gave him a great family, whose numbers are more than the stars in the sky or the grains of sand in the desert. When that family became trapped as slaves in Egypt, God sent them a rescuer, Moses, who led them through the water to freedom.’

Again, the leaders nodded approvingly at the mention of Moses. This was their people’s story – their history. It was the story of who they were and what God was like.

‘And we wandered in the wilderness for 40 years – we had to learn to trust in God completely. But our shoes and clothes did not wear out. We never went short of food and drink. That’s how much God loves us. And he helped us defeat Og, King of Bashan; Sihon, King of the Ammorites; and when Balak, King of Moab, sent Balaam to curse us, he turned it into a blessing. That’s what our God is like! What other God has loved his people as much as our God?!’

All eyes were on Joshua. He paused before what he was going to say next. This was going to be important.

‘So this day, I call upon you to put away all false gods – don’t put your trust in your weaponry, or your wealth, or your wisdom, but serve only God. Put away your idols and serve the living God! You must choose this day whom you will serve. As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord!’

All the leaders cheered and a great cry went up:

‘Yes, we will serve and worship the Lord.’

But Joshua seemed strangely unmoved by this shout of faith and when it had died down, he said solemnly:

‘Will you? Will you truly do this? Do you realise what you are saying? Do you know how great God is? Don’t say it, if you don’t mean it. You must make this choice from the depth of your hearts.’

‘Yes... yes, we will serve and worship the Lord’, came the cry again, even louder.

‘It means no other gods,’ emphasised Joshua. ‘Nothing else must ever take God’s place. So tell me again, is this your sincere choice?’



For a third time, a deafening cry went up, 'Yes! We *will* serve and worship the Lord.'

'Look,' said Joshua, 'this great stone here has heard what you have said. It will stand as a silent witness to your choice this day. I am placing it beneath this oak tree. For all time to come it will be a reminder of what you have decided.'

Joshua made sure that all that had happened was written down in the great scroll - the words of their story that they should never stop reading and repeating for all time to come.

And that was the last speech that Joshua gave; his last words to God's people. But his challenge still echoes down the generations; a cry that still challenges us today:

'Choose this day whom you will serve.'

And what will you reply?

'As for me and my family, we will serve the Lord.'